

CHAPTER III

RECEIVING FROM GOD

James 1:16-27

Introduction

After fourteen verses of showing the "Way of the Wise", James has concluded that our trials are good for us, producing steadfastness—that true wisdom is not produced of man, but comes from God. Since this wisdom comes from God, we should listen to God's warnings about the end of the rich man and the results of both temptation and endurance.

With this true wisdom coming from God we must know how to receive it from God. To hear what God has to say seems to be an art in itself. It is an artful expression of complete submission to His will. Receiving from God is the natural result of faith, the natural culmination of hope, and the producing of God's kind of love in us. Whether or not we are willing to receive knowledge, instruction, and wisdom from God will make the difference in vain religion and pure religion.

All too common among people who claim Christ is the practice of examining God and telling God what to do. Men often act as if they were the judges of God, and far from receiving wisdom from God, they seem better satisfied to give of their wisdom to God. How often we have heard the expression: "God could not be logical and reasonable in His action if He required man to do anything for the receiving of His grace." (Who are we to tell God what is logical and reasonable?) Or again, "A loving God could not permit anyone to go to hell!" (Telling God what He can or cannot do!) Or, "I'm as good as those old hypocrites in the church. If they are allowed into heaven, God will allow me in also!" (As if we were the one who worked out the scheme of redemption from before the foundation of the world! As if we were the one who went up into heaven and brought Jesus down to be born of a woman! As if we were the one who went beyond death and brought Jesus back from the grave! Oh, how far from God man can get with his own vain philosophical reasoning. How futile are the best answers man can devise. Truly, the wis-

dom of man is foolishness with God; and the really wise man will receive his wisdom from God.

Outline

God the Great Giver, gives many things, and they are all good. Therefore we should listen and heed. This will result in both active service and pure religion on our part.

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THE SOURCE OF ALL GOOD THINGS

Text 1:16-18

16. Be not deceived, my beloved brethren.
17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.
18. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Queries

48. How can verse 16 refer to verse 17? (It is easy to see how we could be deceived by sin, but how could we be deceived about the Father?)
49. Could it be possible that there are good gifts that do not come from the Father? (Be careful . . . think this one through!)
50. What word in v. 17 seems to be parallel to "perfect"?
51. "Perfect" usually means complete, or finished, in the New Testament. Here it may have an additional connotation. What is it?
52. In what ways can it be said that God is the "Father of lights?"
53. The "no variation" of the Father may be contrasted highly with another figure in the earlier part of the chapter. Who or what is it?

54. How can something cast a shadow by turning?
55. How does this lack of a "shadow by turning" illustrate God?
56. Why mention the *will* of God?
57. What is the "word of truth"... i.e., where would you look to find it?
58. To whom does the word "firstfruits" refer?
59. "Firstfruits" borrows what significance from the Old Testament?

Paraphrases

- A. 16. Don't let anyone fool you about the sources of good and evil.
 17. All good giving and every complete gift does not come from this earth, but from the Father who is the source of all light. He is always constant and doesn't change to day and night like this turning earth.
 18. It was His desire to give us a new birth by the gospel; that, like the firstfruits, we should be those given over to Him of all mankind.
- B.*17. But whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God, the Creator of all light, and He shines forever without change or shadow.
 18. And it was a happy day for Him when he gave us our new lives, through the truth of His Word, and we became, as it were, the first children of His new family.

Summary

Unlike the man with the fickle, wavering faith, God is the constant source of all good gifts. His quality never flickers nor changes, and this is evident by His will for us: That we could be born again into a new family, a family that totally belongs to Him.

Comment

"Be not deceived", neither about sin nor about righteousness. In I Cor. 6:9 Paul warns not to be deceived about who shall enter into the kingdom of God. He names a number of "present tense" sinners (i.e., sinners who continue in their sin and will not repent) who shall not inherit the kingdom. In like manner, verse 16 refers back

to the way of temptation and sin that went before. But the warning also refers to the way of righteousness to follow. Man is so easily deceived about the true source of good. False reasoning, vain philosophies, poor logic, and inadequate science all lead man to think he has found the source of good in something other than the Father of lights. Thus, parents will encourage their children to prepare themselves to make money, as if money were the source of that which is good for the children. The children themselves will train themselves in the sciences of man, as if man's poor observations of things created will equip man to prepare for himself that which is good for him. In this science (man's limited observations) the children are often deceived into thinking they can find the answer to eternal questions, to the nature of God, to the beginning of the world, to the end of man, to the process of life and growth, to the source of light, to peace and understanding for man, to joy unspeakable, to glory, to hope, and to eternal life. Then in a few short years the fading body and inevitable death reveal the futility of science to answer the really important questions of life. With a wasted life, empty of good things, the disillusioned children come to the close of life empty handed of anything of permanent value. Success in accumulation of money, in politics and in social graces equally fades. How much better to receive the wisdom of God, to heed God's warning about riches, and to know for sure by His revelation the source of all good things and all goodness.

Like a two-edged sword, "Be not deceived" points both ways. One edge cutting the deception of false teachers and theologians regarding the nature of God and the source of good things; another edge cutting the deception and allurements of lust and sin. So Paul uses the expression: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Then note the two-edged warning against being deceived.) "For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life." (Gal. 6:7-8)

Deception is in the heart and mind, not just in the deed. Deception may result in action, but deception is itself within. The emphasis of James is upon right thinking. Wrong ideas will soon lead a man in wrong paths. Right thinking is the only basis of right living. Knowing God is not a guarantee against deception. James is here speaking to "my beloved brethren." We must continually be on our guard against anything that would lead us away from implicit confidence

in God. The elect of God are the subject of continual and subtle influences that would lead them astray, and many of God's children have been devoured of the devil because they consented to be deceived for a time. To embrace, even in our hearts, the things of this world as if they were the first love, is to walk the road of deception. No wonder God warns us that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. No wonder that God warns us against seeking after the things of this world. No wonder we are warned to seek our wisdom from God.

That God is the source of every good and perfect gift is sometimes disputed. Some translation here prefer "only", or "nothing but" for "every." *Every* is not only the preferred translation, but is also harmonious with other Scripture regarding the goodness of God. Some may argue that science can often be the source of good things for man. If science were absolutely true and accurate, it would be nothing more than a description and application of that which God created, and then God looked upon it and said: "It is good." That which is good, though it may appear to come from science, from earthly parents, from government; or from whatever source, is really from God. There is no good source except it be from God and ordained of God. To think otherwise is to be deceived.

The word "perfect" means complete, not sinless. The sinless nature of God's gifts is included in the expression "good gift." The completeness of God's gift is then accentuated by the expression "perfect gift." Some may point out the possibility of the "perfect" here being a repetition of the good gift just before, and thus perfect would seem to mean excluding sin. Of course, the thought is not objectionable, and is in complete harmony with all that God tells us about Himself. If perfect here means sinless, then this would be the one exception for the meaning of the word in the New Testament. Although the thought of "sinless gift" is not objectionable, it would seem the better exegesis to the Scriptural usage of the word: perfect gift=complete gift.

Father of lights is a beautiful and revealing expression concerning God. First, God can be said to be the Father of lights because he created light, and created the heavenly bodies that give light in this universe. (Gen. 1; Psalms 136:7) God is thereby the source of physical warmth, and food, and life. God is thereby the sustainer as well as the creator, for the heavenly bodies were not only created, but they continue in existence and in giving light. Second, God is the

Father of lights in that He is the source of spiritual light and blessing. This is the most important light, and seems to be the significance of references to God as the "light of the world." (see Psalms 36:9; John 1:1; 8:12; Psalms 27:1). Third, God is the Father of lights in that He is the *effulgent* source of light. Light may show through the Word of God, light may be reflected in the life of the Christian, and physical light may come from the stars; but all these simply reflect the light of God, the true source. (I John 1:5; Heb. 1:3).

The constancy of the Father of lights is also doubly emphasized. "With whom can be no variation" is in contrast with the unstable man described earlier. It may also be put in contrast with the mistaken sources of light men sometimes follow. Specifically, the noun "variation" refers to astronomical changes. Unlike the rising and setting of the sun (as we think of it), and unlike the waning and waxing of the moon, and possibly unlike the twinkling appearing and disappearing stars, God does not vary. His light is constant. His gifts are consistent.

The thought is further brought out in the expression "neither shadow that is cast by turning." Certainly this expression is an amplification of the former. Ropes suggest that the two phrases are a single expression, as "neither variation which consists of turning shadow." Either way, the thought is not altered. The moon, in its orbit about the earth, varies its light because of its turning shadow. With God, there is no such variation. Likewise, the sun is dim at sunrise, bright during the day, dim at sunset, and dark at night, because of the shadow of the turning earth. With God, this is not so. God's omnipresent light never fails, unlike the seasons, the length of days on the earth, and the changing planets.

Educators and students alike despair in their search for that which is constant and unchanging. The shortest distance between two points is now determined not always to be a straight line, and the most stable of mathematical and scientific axioms are found to be relative and unstable. The "Teddy boys" of England and the "Beatniks" of New York are a living testimony of the lack of a "solid rock" on which they can build their lives and their philosophies. The search for stability is fruitless in philosophy, in mathematics, in science, in politics, and in education. But he who will build his life upon Christ Jesus; he who will put his confidence in God, this one

has a solid rock on which to build. In God one finds the Ultimate, and the only ultimate. God is the answer, and the only answer. Unshaking stability, unvarying light, unchanging personality, the same yesterday, today, and forever; this is God. From His throne flows peace like a river, and there is no other source. From His heart flows the purest "agape" love, and there is no other source. He is the rock of ages from whom comes the truth, and there is no other source. Praises be to Him, the author of every good gift and every perfect gift.

The thought of an unchanging God who does not fluctuate in His goodness towards man is further reinforced by pointing to the greatest blessing of all that flows from Him. Man is brought forth from sin and condemnation by the Word of Truth. Man can be begotten anew, born again with a fresh, sinless start and a new living heart. In contrast to the birth of sin (v. 15), here we see the birth of life. To be "brought forth" implies two states: (1) that from which one comes. . . . from sin, fruitlessness, disappointment, condemnation and despair; and (2) that to which one comes . . . to life everlasting, to joy unspeakable and full of glory, to peace that passes all understanding. The Word of Truth is the gospel of God's revelation through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, and through which God has ordained the world of men to be regenerated in Christ Jesus. No theory of the new birth is scriptural and accurate that does not involve the revelation of God in His word. How can they possibly be born again "except they hear"? To be born again by direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or by direct revelation from God, is not a Biblical idea. "The Word of Truth" is part of the unchanging scheme of redemption that originated with our God, who is unchanging Himself.

Further, we note that this "born again" scheme that offers complete goodness to man is of the will of God. The plan is His, and came from His heart's desire. Our salvation is the result of the deliberate choice of God. This plan He foreordained before the foundation of the world; and there is none other that can take a single ounce of credit for God's wonderful plan. All that is good comes from Him, and nothing that is evil comes from Him. For this reason those who choose God on His own terms become the choicest part of the harvest, "kind of like" the firstfruits of the Old Testament. (See Deut. 18:4; Num. 18:12; Ex. 13:11-16) Hence of all God's creatures, (probably referring only to man-creatures) the ones who are born again become the perfect "living sacrifice" offered up to God, and also be-

come an earnest of more fruit to follow, as they testify of Christ before the world of lost men.

TO LISTEN IS BETTER THAN TO SPEAK

Text 1:19-21

19. Ye know this, my beloved brethren, But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
20. for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.
21. Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Queries

60. Should the first two phrases of verse 19 go with the portion that follows, or actually go with the statements that went before? (The clue is in the context. . . . which did they already know?)
61. "Swift to hear" what?
62. "Slow to speak" what? (Is he speaking of hearing and speaking a specific thing, or giving general instruction for getting along with people? Note what follows immediately.)
63. To whom is the wrath of man in v. 20 directed? (Man, or God?)
64. Is the statement of v. 20 a general truth, or are there some notable exceptions to the rule?
65. Is "righteous indignation" the same as "wrath of man"?
66. Does "overflowing" of wickedness imply there can be some wickedness without having an overflow of it? (Note: King James has "superfluity of naughtiness.")
67. The "meekness" of verse 21 is contrasted with what other characteristic of personality in this section of Scripture?
68. What kind of word is an "implanted" word?

Paraphrases

- A. 19. You already know it is better to be a good listener than a good speaker, dear brothers, and control your temper:
20. For an angry man is not doing what God wants him to do.
21. Therefore, strip off the filthy garments of sin and stop sin's

overflowing of wickedness upon you; gratefully receive the inborn word of God through which you have salvation.

- B.*19. Dear brothers, don't ever forget that it is best to listen much, speak little, and not become angry;
20. For anger doesn't make us good, as God demands that we must be.
21. So get rid of all that is wrong in your life, both inside and outside, and humbly be glad for the wonderful message we have received, for it is able to save our souls as it grows in our hearts.

Summary

We would get along better if we would learn to listen rather than giving vent to our anger, which is unrighteous, and should be put away along with all of sin's contamination. It is the only way we can have salvation through the word we have received in our hearts.

Comment

The admonition to "be swift to hear" has several applications. The most obvious, however, is determined by the grammatical construction. The reference is general; that we learn more while listening than while speaking (v.21). Some may even include the speaking as a teacher in 3:1, which though permissible, does not seem to be the context here. Since "slow to speak" is coupled with "swift to hear", the two seem to be put in natural contrast. Since in v. 21 and 22 James speaks of hearing the word, some may feel the subject is introduced here: be swift to hear the Word of God. This is not likely, however, for the man would likewise be cautioned to be slow to speak to God; and quite obviously the anger described is directed toward man, not God.

Some may ponder what is known by the beloved brethren. J. W. Roberts seems to indicate James is saying: "Ye know this (that we are begotten by the Word of Truth) my beloved brethren, but (let me say something new), let every man be swift to hear, etc." James could also be saying, "Ye know this, but I shall say it anyway."

The wrath of v. 19 also seems to be ordinary anger, i.e., lack of self-control against one's brother, or against any man. This is quite

different from the righteous indignation one may have in sympathy with God's character and Divine will. Self-control seems to increase righteous indignation, but will overcome anger. Further, the statement of v. 20 makes clear the wrongness of the wrath herein mentioned.

The wrath of man is so obviously an enemy of personality, of reasoning, of attainment, that it seems superfluous to mention it here. Yet, James does mention it; and he does not drop the subject. The bulk of an entire chapter is spent on the misuse of the tongue. Perhaps, the fallacy of anger is obvious because it is so common. And yet, since it is so common, all the more we need the additional warning here. The high emotional state of one in intense anger makes reasoning almost impossible. Under the influence of this state of anger, one will often do and say things he will forever regret. Anger, which robs one of his reasoning and inhibition, can be as sinful as narcotics or alcohol, which does the same thing.

The admonition of James certainly does indicate that man can do something about his tendency to anger. By willpower and self-control one can, with the help of God, overcome most terrible habits in this loss of self-control. This is a subject that needs much teaching, much admonition, and certainly much self-control. One so afflicted should prayerfully seek help of the Lord. "But why," we may ask, "do people become angry so easily . . . especially when they know it is profitless?"

James seems to sense the question, for he answers it immediately in v. 21. Anger is most easily provoked when the inconsistencies of one's life is laid bare. When the wrongness of a man's action is made clear, that man will usually do one of two things: (1) He will repent, therefore correcting the wrong and ridding himself of the embarrassment of the inconsistency; or (2) He will become angry about the situation, thus dulling his reasoning capacity so that he no longer is facing the embarrassment. When deeds and conscience conflict, one may change the deeds or dull the conscience. Repentance changes the deeds. Anger dulls the reasoning capacity, thus the conscience. Often this is the psychology behind one who vigorously attacks the preacher, or behind one who is constantly fighting the church, or even angry with God. This accounts for the stoning of Stephen, and the Old Testament stoning of the prophets. In fact, it is the unrepented sins that crucified Jesus.

Consequently, the Godly way to rid oneself of the anger-pro-

voking situation is to repent. Putting away filthiness is the language of removing filthy clothing, or cleansing dirt from the body. The "superfluity of naughtiness" (King James) is weak here . . . For the naughtiness (wickedness) is wicked every drop. Any of the wickedness causes an overflowing of filth that needs removal. On this occasion "overflowing of wickedness" is the better reading. Any sin overflows and, like leaven, contaminates the whole.

The only alternative to this anger-provoking situation is to let God have His way . . . and the Sword of the Spirit cuts the sin which we willingly remove from our lives; and hence our souls are saved!

LISTENING IS POINTLESS WITHOUT DOING

Text 1:22-25

- 1:22. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves.
23. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror:
24. for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.
25. But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing.

Queries

69. Explain how hearing without doing is actually "deluding" oneself.
70. What is the "natural" face?
71. The natural face and the mirror represent what concerning the man who hears and does not?
72. How is the New Testament the "perfect law"? (Remember the Biblical meaning of the word "perfect.")
73. Why would the New Testament be called the "law of liberty?"
74. Since the word "law" is here used in describing the Word of God, could it be that James is speaking of the Old Testament law, and not of the New? How do you know?
75. In what way may Christianity be referred to as a law?
76. Since the doer must work, is not James teaching salvation by works?

Paraphrases

- A. 22. You fool yourselves if you listen to the Word of God but don't obey it.
23. For if this is what you are doing, you are like a man looking at his physical face in a mirror;
24. who sees himself but immediately departs without remembering what he saw.
25. But he that continues to see himself described clearly in the New Testament and, unlike the man above, proceeds to do something about what he sees, shall be blessed for his action.
- B.*22. And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. So don't fool yourselves:
23. For if a person just listens and doesn't obey, he is like a man looking at his face in a mirror;
24. As soon as he walks away, he can't see himself anymore or remember what he looks like.
25. But if he keeps looking steadily into God's law for free men he will not only remember it, but do what it says, and God will greatly bless that man in everything he does.

Summary

A man fools himself who thinks there is profit in reading the Word of God without doing what it says. But if a man continues to read the Word and conforms himself to what he reads, God will bless his action.

Comment

Self-deception is a means of cheating oneself. The desire to believe a lie is behind self-deception. "And why," one may ask, "does a person wish to believe a lie?" Because the truth hurts, and we do not like to be hurt. This particular deception is ironic in that it is so obvious in others, and yet so hard to detect in ourselves. The secret is desire. If we love a sin or a wrong doing, with reluctance we examine it in the light of God's Word. Once having seen what it really is in God's sight, we are caught in a dilemma: for the Word

of God and our conscience say *no*, and our desire says *yes*. We can either reform our desire and continue with the Word of God, or we can engage in a bit of mental gymnastics that reasons: "This is an interesting bit of advice but, of course, it doesn't apply to me." When we do the latter, we promptly turn from the Word of God (It makes us uncomfortable!) and dismiss it from our mind. The rationalization involved may be quite complicated, or it may be as simple as that above. In either case, the result is that we have deluded ourselves into believing a lie . . . a lie so obvious that anyone else can see through it easily; but we, in blissful self-chosen ignorance, continue with our dirty sin no longer knowing that it stinks in the sight of God and in the nostrils of men.

Self-deception, ignorance, and conceit go hand in hand. We have already pointed out that one who prefers to be ignorant of God's truth will deceive himself; and one who deceives himself will become ignorant of the truth he once understood. Galatians 6:3 points out that conceit is very closely related. "For if a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." Either directly or indirectly, a man will boost his own ego in order to rationalize his action to the point of complete ignorance of God's will. The whole process, of course, is self-deception. Puffed up with our inflated opinion of ourselves, we arrogantly ignore God's plain words regarding our action, explaining our disobedience to ourselves in such a way that our conscience will be eased and we can forget what we read.

Oh, beloved brother . . . how do *you* read God's Word? Is the Word of God a pattern by which your life is adjusted and governed? Is God's will for your philosophy, or for your life? Do you find His commandments grievous, and His will contrary to your own? Do you rejoice to go back to God's Word again and again to determine His will for your life, or do you prefer to read and forget? Do you prefer to argue the Word with others about peripheral interpretations and matters that do not pertain to your own personal life? Can it be that you need to see James 1:16-27 as your own personal mirror, and read it again and again; then on your knees before God ask for His help in making the proper adjustment in your life?

The natural face we see in a mirror of silver, copper or tin is the same face that other men see when they look at us. The "natural face" is here the face given to each person by physical birth and natural growth; hence, the physical face, or the "face that nature

gave him." (Ropes) The face we see in the mirror of God is our spiritual appearance . . . not primarily as we appear to others, but rather as we appear to God. Therein we see our soul as God sees us. We may not like it, in fact we are not expected to like it. . . . Therefore we turn to God for help in making it over. We seek to be born again so that God can make us what we ought to be. This involves far more than a change in desire and spirit . . . it involves a change in deeds and action. Since there is no earning power in the deeds, the deeds without the converted heart earn us absolutely nothing in God's sight. Yet the "converted" heart that does not change the deeds and life of the individual is not converted in the manner that God wants. The total conversion involves deeds as well as desires.

The "perfect law, the law of liberty" is obviously the gospel of Christ which sets us free. This is the same Word of Truth that makes us new creatures (1:18). Yet, why will it be called a "law" here? The point of emphasis is that it must govern our lives and deeds, and this is the primary function of "law." Hence, the New Testament is a law in that it is a pattern for my life and a guide for my deeds. It is not a law in the sense of the Old Testament law . . . wherein a person earns wages and receives what he earns. In the gospel "law," I govern my life and conform to God's wishes, but I do not receive what I earn. I am a sinner, I have earned death . . . eternal death. Christ fulfilled the law in that He received what I earned, thus I do not take upon myself the "just recompense" for my deeds. Rather, I receive eternal life and joy and peace, none of which I have earned. Christianity is therefore a way of life (law) founded on faith (belief) in Christ which bestows upon me the grace (free gift) of salvation. (For other references of the New Testament as law, see John 13:34; Rom. 3:27; I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; I John 2:7 ff.)

VAIN AND PURE RELIGION CONTRASTED

Text 1:26-27

26. If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain.
27. Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this,

to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Queries

77. The faith and works (hearing and doing) of the previous passages are summed up in a single word in verse 26. Which word is it?
78. These two verses tie very closely with verse 19. Wherein is the tie?
79. Explain how a man with a run-a-way tongue has deceived his heart.
80. What does the word "pure" mean? How can it modify "religion?"
81. Does v. 27 describe a full definition of religion?
82. If not, what is lacking?
83. We who can call God "our Father" stand in open contrast with something else in this verse. What is it?
84. What is the meaning of "unspotted"? i.e., what is it that can spot the Christian? Spotted with what?
85. What is "the world" as it is used here?
86. Verse 26 speaks of the possibility of a "vain" religion. What is a vain religion?

Paraphrases

- A. 26. A man with a run-a-way tongue is deceiving himself if he thinks he is religious. Such a religion would be of no profit to him.
27. A clean religion that stands without accusation before God includes the visiting of suffering orphans and widows, and the keeping of oneself free from the sinful desires and deeds of this life.
- B.* 26. If anyone says he is a Christian but doesn't control his sharp tongue, he is just fooling himself and his religion isn't worth much.
27. The Christian who is pure and without fault, from God the Father's point of view, is the one who takes care of

orphans and widows, and whose soul remains true to the Lord—not soiled and dirtied by its contacts with the world.

Summary

A man also fools himself who has both religion and a wild tongue. A profitable religion is one that causes a man to keep himself free from sin and also helps others who have need, rather than slaying them with his tongue.

Comment

The religious man is here one who worships; both with the heart and with acts of worship. Applied to the Christian, this would describe the ardent church-goer who professes himself to be a Christian through prayer, worship, and Bible study. Yet all this does not bring profit to the man. James has just previously stated that all this without a life of *doing* the will of Christ would bring no profit. Now, he adds that all this without controlling the tongue would also spoil his religion. Even as worship without the deeds of Christ is a means of fooling oneself, so worship with a sharp tongue is also a means of self-deception.

James has already mentioned the subject of unwise use of the tongue in v. 19 "let every man be slow to speak." Now he returns to the subject with renewed vigor, and he will not drop the matter here! Surely this must be one of the greatest and most wide-spread weaknesses of human nature. No doubt there was reason for the special emphasis in the churches that received James' epistle. And what church today does not yet need the same emphasis? Is not this another proof that human nature has not changed? Each of us may have particular sins that do easily beset us, yet this one sin of misusing the tongue we all understand. James expands the subject in chapter 3, and no wonder!

The particular verb used in describing the controlled tongue suggests the bridling of a wild horse. Again, James by inference introduces a figure he shall describe more fully later on.

The self-deception involved in the misuse of the tongue is an interesting thought. A man, secure in the conviction that his religion and his worship is acceptable with God, will grow all the more vehement with his tongue-slaughter. Like Moses, if he is not careful, he

will sit on the throne of God and pass both judgment and sentence on his fellow man; personally seeing to it that the sinners that surround him will get the tongue-lashing they "deserve." And the deception feeds itself! The more he lashes and cuts and destroys, the more like God he feels; until finally the very air reeks with his presence and all men tremble at the sound of his voice. It seems that some tongues will only be stilled when their owners face God in the judgment!

This is not intended to be a complete definition of religion. The worship implied by the very word "religion" is a vital part of Christianity. Complete surrender to Christ, a faith in Him that will go all the way, a compliance to the scheme of redemption He has designed Himself, is all necessary to true worship. James is not here talking of these things. He has mentioned two things that will make a man's religion vain: The lack of good action, and the uncontrolled tongue. The opposite of these two is the unspotted life and the helpful attitude towards those in need. James is thus showing the two extremes in these two matters.

Vain Religion	vs.	Pure and undefiled Religion
Religion without action. (v. 22, 23, 24, 25)	vs.	Doers of the word, unspotted from the world. (v. 23, 27)
Religion with an uncontrolled tongue. (v. 19, 26)	vs.	Sympathetic help for those in need. (v. 27)

These two comparisons have to do with human relationships. Omitted are the divine relationships. A full definition of pure religion would, of course, include this.

Interesting also to note is the interplay between the "fatherless" and those of us who can appeal to "our Father." We who have a heavenly Father to whom we can appeal should feel all the more sympathy to those who have not the advantage of an earthly father. Of course, our sympathy for those who know not our heavenly Father would be all the greater. Far from the desire to cut and lash with our tongue, we would desire to win them to Christ, to love them for the Father's sake, and to lead them to what they could be rather than cursing them for what they are.

Not to be slighted is the picture of the man spotted by the sinful slush of this world. The young man, with his car polished clean and white, asked if he could park it in front of the house. "You may

park that pretty car there is you wish" was the reply, "but you won't drive it away!" Thinking the matter some kind of a joke, the car was left parked. Three hours later the young man returned to find his car covered with great gobs of black mud. He had parked his car by two mud-filled holes in the pavement, and passing cars had done the rest. Yes, friend; you are free in Christ. You may park that lily-white carcass of yours by the sinful chugholes of this world if you wish . . . but you will not be lily-white for long! If we could only realize that it is not just for His good pleasure that God warns us . . . but for *our benefit!*

SERMON OUTLINES

HOW TO LISTEN TO A SERMON James 1:20-25

Introduction: If a sermon is wasted, the time gone is multiplied by every person who fails to hear. If 100 people fail to hear one half-hour sermon, 50 man-hours are wasted!

Proposition: How to *really hear* the sermon so as to get the most out of it.

I. PREPARE YOURSELF TO HEAR v. 21a

- A. Get ready physically. Proper rest, preparation the day before. The state of your physical body has much to do with your spiritual attitude.
- B. Get ready intellectually.
 - 1. Lay aside worries (Unpaid bills, Sunday dinner, etc.)
 - 2. Determine in your heart you will listen. (Plan it!)
 - 3. Prepare to take notes. (Have Bible, paper, pen ready)
- C. Get ready spiritually.
 - 1. Lay apart filthiness (All ungodly attitudes).
 - 2. Pray beforehand.
 - 3. Expect something big in your own heart ("Sir, we would see Jesus.")

II. HOW TO HEAR THE SERMON v. 21b

A. RECEIVE IT

- 1. Pay attention to what is said.
- 2. Take careful notes.

3. Ask yourself pertinent questions as you hear.
4. Listen critically, determining whether or not what you hear is true according to the Scripture. (Acts 17:11)

B. SUBMIT TO IT

1. With the spirit of meekness. (Receiving it *yourself*, not expecting it to hit your neighbor.)
2. Expect the sword to cut. (That is the purpose of the Sword of the Spirit)

C. UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE

1. The stakes are high (Salvation, preservation, purification, growth.)
2. Hear in order to do (v. 22).
3. Hearers only are self-deceivers.

III. PROPER USE OF THE WORD (v. 23-25)

- A. See ourselves as we really are.
- B. Clean up, buck up, pick up, grow up. (We must or we are lost!)
- C. Be ye reconciled to God.

HUMAN AND DIVINE WRATH James 1:20

Proposition: What is the difference between human and Divine wrath, and what should our attitude be toward both?

I. HUMAN WRATH worketh not the righteousness of God.

- A. What excites human wrath?
 1. Selfishness. (Desiring that for which we have no right)
 2. Vanity. (Thinking more highly of myself than I should.)
 3. Impatience (Not awaiting the right time, nor the due season).
- B. What form does human wrath take?
 1. Excited emotion (or passion).
 2. Irrationality (I Sam. 25:17).
 3. Violence (Peter cutting off the guard's ear).
- C. What follows human wrath?
 1. Undignified behavior (Foolish, Prov. 14:17; folly, Prov. 14:29).
 2. Sin (Even to the point of ruined lives . . . Prov. 29:22)

3. Blasphemy (vain and vile speech; taking the Lord's name in vain).

II. DIVINE WRATH does the righteousness of God.

A. What excites Divine wrath?

1. All unrighteousness and ungodliness (Rom. 1:18).
2. Usurpation of God's authority (Eph. 5:6; John 3:36).
3. All that destroys God's work. (Thus joining the "beast" Rev. 14:10)

B. How is it manifested?

1. Not in heated passion.
2. In calm, deliberate judgment.

C. How does it operate?

1. In longsuffering (II Pet. 3:11).
2. In condemnation
3. In judgment.
4. In eternal destruction

D. What the effect upon man?

1. God's hate for sin is established.
2. God's Word is vindicated.
3. God's power and authority is demonstrated.

III. OUR ATTITUDE toward Divine and human wrath should be what?

A. Toward human wrath . . .

1. Avoid it except where impossible (Rom. 12:17).
2. Control it. (Prov. 16:32).
3. Heed the Scriptures (Follow God's example and let your wrath work righteousness!).

B. Toward Divine wrath . . .

1. Recognize the possibility.
2. Fear it
3. Avoid bringing it upon yourself
4. Seek the Righteousness of God.

CONCLUSION: Man's wrath worketh sin;
God's wrath works against sin

TWELVE SERMON TITLES WITH THREE-POINT OUTLINES

THE SOURCE OF ALL GOOD THINGS 1:16-18

1. Good and perfect gifts come from above. v. 17.

2. Good and perfect gifts come from the Father, v. 17.
3. All good and perfect gifts are the will of the Father, v. 18.

WHAT EVERY MAN KNOWS 1:19-20

1. Everybody loves a good listener.
2. Think twice before you speak.
3. Count to ten when anger comes.

TO LISTEN IS BETTER THAN TO SPEAK 1:19-21

1. A fast-to-speak person easily expresses wrath.
2. A fast-to-hear person more easily hears God's Word.
3. To confuse the above is to deceive ourselves.

EMPTY IT BEFORE YOU FILL IT 1:21

1. Empty your life of filthiness.
2. Fill your life with the Word.
3. And your soul shall be saved.

RECEIVING THE WORD OF GOD 1:21

1. Hearing with the attitude of meekness.
2. Implant it in your heart.
3. Through it your soul is saved.

THE GREAT DELUSION 1:22-24

1. Having enough for the appearance of reality (Hearing the Word).
2. Short enough to miss the real thing (Not doing the Word).
3. Desiring enough to be deceived (Deluding yourself).

VAIN AND PURE RELIGION CONTRASTED 1:26-27

1. Harm to fellow man makes religion vain, v. 26.
2. Good to fellow man is pure religion, v. 27a.
3. Freedom from spots of sin is pure religion, v. 27b.

BEHOLD YOURSELF 1:23-25

1. Yourself as others see you (Your natural face.)
2. Yourself as God sees you (Your spiritual self.)
3. Yourself as redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (Continuing in the law of liberty.)

ITS EASY TO FORGET 1:22-26

1. What manner of man you really are. v. 24.
2. That an evil tongue can spoil good deeds. v. 26.
3. That you must *do* as well as *hear*. v. 22.

VAIN RELIGION 1:26

1. Caused when a man falsely thinks himself to be religious.
2. Caused when a man bridles not his tongue.
3. Caused when a man deceives his own heart.

PURE RELIGION 1:27

1. Before God: it is undefiled.
2. Before man: it helps those in need.
3. Before self: it is unspotted from sin.

SPECIAL STUDY

ALIVE AND FREE IN CHRIST

A Brief Consideration of Galatians 5:13-26

Alive means to be joined. Freedom means to be loosed. It appears that they mean the opposite. To be alive in this world means the body is joined to the spirit. To be alive in Christ means our Spirit is joined to Christ. "Alive," that is, joined to Christ, and "Free" in Christ at the same time! It may seem strange, but true it is. The only way to be free indeed is to be alive in Christ. The love of sin so commits and binds our affections that it appears man can do nothing else than sin. The practice of sin forms chains so strong that man is completely shackled by his own evil deeds. Sin's consequences in the next existence after this earth are so clearly described in God's Book that they cannot be correctly denied. Sin's results in this life are evident on every hand, and in every person. Surely the binding is so irrevokable that man, psychologically confined by the guilt of his own sin, cries out for release.

And God in the person of Christ our Lord has given that release. Through His love for us, our prison of the love of sin is changed to the love of Christ. Our confinement to the practice of sin is changed by conversion, (i.e., repentance) to Christ Jesus. The terrible consequences of sin, eternal death, are changed by the new

birth in Christ to eternal life with Him forever. Surely, we have been freed! "But this is only part of our prison," you may argue.

Even in Christ man is limited. Man is limited by the power and authority of God. Man is limited by his existence in time . . . and it seems so short when the journey is finished! Man is limited by space, and can never in this life hope to escape the solar system to which he is confined. Man is limited by his environmental circumstances. He cannot help, and is not responsible for the color of his skin, the place of his birth, the conditions of the home of his childhood . . . yet every one of these influence his life! Man is limited by his own fleshly body and is constantly having to alter that which he wishes to do to conform to that which he *can* do.

You may then argue: "Since man, a Christian man, is bound by these things . . . how then is man *free* in Christ? The first two verses of our text answer this question for us. Let us examine them:

Galatians 5:13,14—"For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only *use* not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

We are called unto liberty . . . by love serving one another. We are free to be a voluntary slave! "How then is slavery freedom?" you may ask. It is freedom, because I am a slave by choice. I am called into liberty: a life of love. I voluntarily serve God, because I love God. I love God because He first loved me. The non-christian may ask: "Then if you *must* serve God, is this not slavery? Is it not being bound?" Yes, I am bound to Christ . . . but you don't understand. You see, I *choose* to be bound to Christ. The action of the Jew in the Old Testament was governed by Requirement of *the law*. The action of the Christian, now, is controlled by his love for his fellow man. The Old Testament Jew was the old man sin, forced to govern his action because of the binding force of the law. The New Testament Christian is a *new creature in Christ*. . . Born again, voluntarily governing his action because he is born again of God's kind of love. The Christian, in serving God and his fellow man, *is doing precisely what he wants to do*.

You see, as a new-born saint of God, I am free . . . free to do *exactly* what I wish—for *exactly* what I wish is to serve Christ! My will is His will, for my will is surrendered completely to Him. Thus,

with Christ's love in my heart, I voluntarily serve my God and my neighbor. No wonder the Scriptures state,

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Gal. 5:14.

To fulfill does not mean to destroy—but rather to complete (to fill up, or fill full). Thus if the law is fulfilled, it is accomplished. Not because the law requires it, but because the love of Christians makes them *want* to do it. So the requirements of the law are fulfilled by love. This very principle itself is taken directly from the Old Testament:

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD." Lev. 19:18.

"You mean, you may ask, "That Christians never attack one another? You mean they keep the good deeds of the law out of the *love* principle, and they never misbehave?" No! This is not what I mean. Christians may bite and snarl at one another like animals. But if they are true Christians, this is not what they want, and they regret it from the depths of their hearts. Look at verse 15:

"But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." Gal. 5:15.

When you bite and devour your brother, you are destroying and consuming him. As a Christian who loves his brother, this is precisely what you do *not* want. Your flesh may even demand that you sin, but the real *you* inside, wants to please God.

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Gal. 5:16-17.

Man must fulfill something. If you serve Christ in love, you will fulfill the law. If you do sinful things, you fulfill the lust of the flesh. Which will you fulfill? The law, or lust of the flesh? The *only* way to fulfill the law is by the loving spirit of Christ in you. People under the law could not fulfill the law. Christ fulfilled the law; and we, through Him, continue to fulfill the law. But this new spirit within us does often oppose the appetites of the flesh, which continue right or wrong!

"But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Gal. 5:18.

I am not bound by the binding force of legal obligations and re-

quirements, but yet my life is more successfully controlled! You see, I'm in love! The object of my affection is Jesus Christ, and *by choice* I do not want to displease Him, for I love Him. (If I want to displease Him, then there is something wrong with my love!)

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Gal. 5:19-21.

These sins are obvious desires of the flesh. If I do not have desires to please Jesus, then these fleshly desires may be all that is left. How tragic are the thousands who know not Jesus and live continually after only these fleshly, sensuous pleasures! They know nothing of the fruit of Christ. They have no knowledge of God's kind of love! They cannot even understand freedom in Christ . . . freedom to walk after the life of the Spirit.

These next items are the things a Christian *wants*. These are not laws that inhibit, but fruits that result from identifying with the Spirit. See how this freedom applies to the fruits of the Spirit.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Gal. 5:22-23.

Notice that the first fruit is love. By this, we are motivated to produce all the other fruits. Notice also, that the last fruit is temperance . . . i.e. self-control. Real self-control is possible through love. Partial self-control may be enforced by law, but this is misery if it is against the person's heart-desire. If you *love* to do that which the law states, then the law is not an objectionable control force to you, but merely a statement of that which you want and intend to do. The word *meekness* does not mean to be weak and submissive, but rather a spirited war horse filled with energy and life that responds to the will of his master with all the energy at his command.

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Gal. 5:24.

Old man sin is dead. Our new creature does not agree with the fleshly appetites. Yes, we are still in the flesh, but the flesh has a

new master: the loving spirit of Christ within. The flesh can no longer get its way. We are alive in the spirit.

**"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." Gal. 5:26.

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Gal. 5:25.

If I as a Christian walk in the flesh and not the spirit, I become miserable. I then do that which I do not wish to do, and I am torn with remorse and disgust. When I walk in the Spirit . . . i.e., I do the things the Holy Spirit desires, then I am *elated* in Christ. I have the peace that passes all understanding. Because I am good? *No* I am not good . . . but Christ, who is in me, in whom and for whom I live . . . *he is good*. "Let us" again implies that this walk is a matter of our will and that God wants us to so walk because we freely choose to so walk. Mr. Burke put it this way: "Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites."

**Galatians 5:26.

To think that I myself must be glorified brings contention and envy. To put the glory on Christ, where it belongs, is the way of joy and freedom of spirit. To sum it up we might say that the will of Christ expressed in the New Testament is my command . . . because I choose to be commanded by His Spirit. Since this is my choice, then the governing of my life goes beyond the expressed will of Christ in the New Testament. I will voluntarily conform my life to what I determine to be the will of Christ even though I do not find that will clearly stated in New Testament words. Thus, the "borderline" sins of this life, though they may tempt me, present no problem to my heart's desire . . . to my inner man . . . to the "new born" *creature*.

But if I am not born again and have not the Spirit of Christ within, then Christ's will is not my will; and I find the New Testament expressions of the will of Christ to be commandments that would hedge me in against my will. Even the New Testament becomes to me a law that would hinder me from doing the things I want to do.

The New Testament, to the unconverted, is a legal pen, a law system that inhibits the actions of man and keeps him from doing what he wants to do. To him the New Testament is distasteful, and moreover, is impossible as a legal system—impossible, for the "commandments" therein are beyond the commandments of the

Old Testament. And man stands condemned before God, for his unconverted heart makes the New Testament to him a law—a law that *must* be kept, against his will—a law that not only would restrict his desires, but a law that condemns because he has not obeyed and cannot obey.

To be born again is to be alive. Life is to be joined to Christ. His will becomes my will. His will in the New Testament is an expression of what I intend and want to do because it is His will. Consequently I am free to do exactly what I want to do: The Will of Christ. The same Christ is either my hope and salvation and joy, or a stumbling stone and the author of a system of commandments. It all depends on my relationship to Him. Alive, and free in Christ—or dead, and hedged about by a perfect legal system.